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Packing Llamas on Public Land

Llamas: Naturally agile, intelligent, and calm, these elegant creatures make outstanding pack animals. In fact, llamas have been used to transport goods across the rugged Andean Mountains in South America for over 4,000 years.

Today, all across the United States and Canada, llamas can be found carrying loads for North American back-country travelers. In situations where the environment is easily damaged or where easy handling and surefootedness are important, llamas are actually "the pack animal of choice!"

As the use of llamas on public land increases, people who pack llamas need to know more about a number of concepts that will lead to safe, enjoyable back-country experiences, while minimizing damage to our valued natural resources.

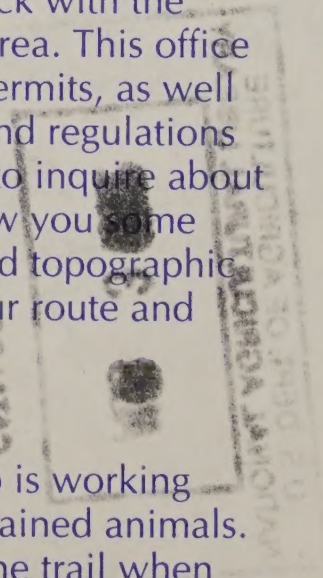
What to Know Before You Go

Tips for Trip Planning

Planning a trip onto public lands? Check with the local Ranger District in charge of the area. This office will provide you with any necessary permits, as well as information about trail conditions and regulations that may apply to pack stock. Be sure to inquire about less-used trails and areas that will allow you some solitude. Another tip is to obtain a good topographic map of the areas and use it to plan your route and possible campsites.

Getting Your Llama Ready

The key to a successful llama pack trip is working with healthy, well-conditioned, well-trained animals. Llamas, like people, perform best on the trail when they are in good condition.





Before your backcountry trip, start a preconditioning program for yourself and your llamas. Begin at home by taking your llamas for short walks with light loads. Gradually work up to longer distances with more weight. Be sure your llamas have been wormed for internal parasites, that they have current vaccinations (don't forget tetanus!) and that their toenails have been properly trimmed well before embarking on your trip.

Pack llamas should be used to being saddled and carrying loads before their first trip into the backcountry. It is also important that they know how to safely negotiate a picket line and simple obstacles like streams and fallen logs.

Low-Impact Camping

Ready to pack for your trip? Do it with an eye to practicing low-impact camping techniques. Lightweight, backpack-style tents and cooking gear will make your trip easier on the land and on your llamas. Take along a gas or propane stove for cooking, and plan to keep your warming campfires (where they are allowed) small. Remember that what you pack in you will pack out. Plan to bring home any empty foil, plastic, or aluminum containers, as only leftover food and paper items should be burned in a fire.

Pack Stock Equipment

Along with the rest of the camping equipment, llama packers will need:

- a swivel picket stake and a 10 to 20-foot line for staking out llamas in camp
- hand scales for weighing and balancing loads
- a curry brush to remove debris before saddling
- an extra halter

- a ration of supplemental feed
- a first-aid kit that includes medications and equipment for treating minor llama injuries and ailments

When organizing your llama pack equipment, make sure all your gear works and is in good repair. If you use frame pack saddles, be sure that they adequately clear your animals' spines. If you use soft packs, be careful not to place heavy items directly over their spines.

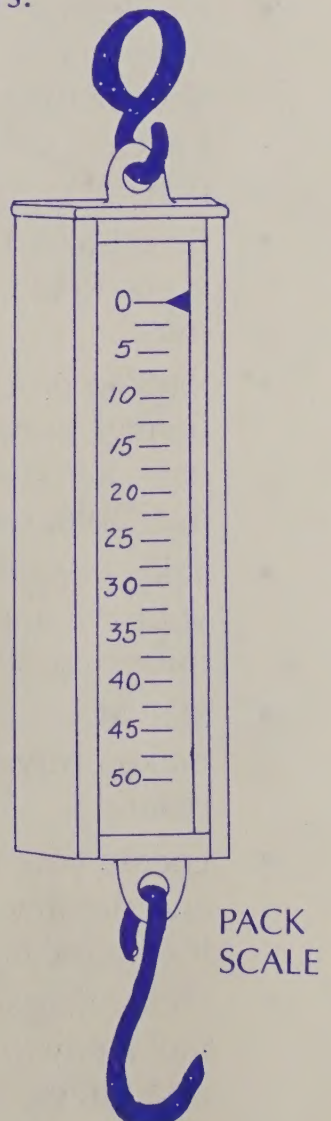
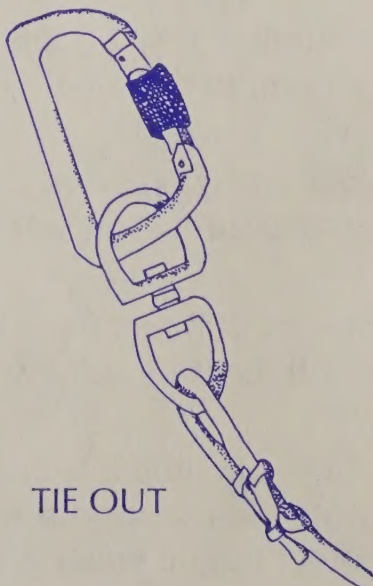
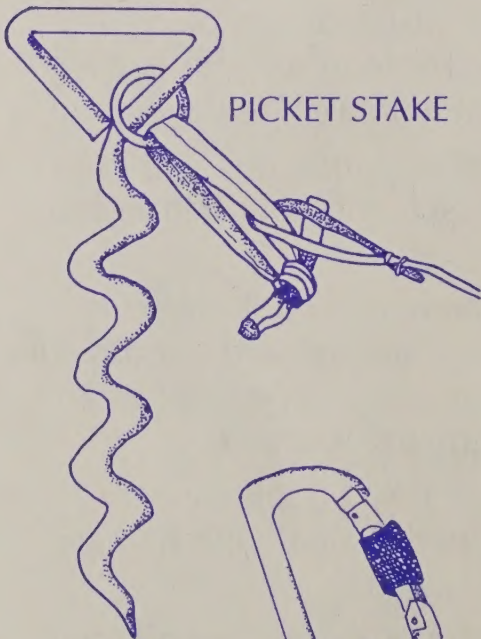
Whatever type of pack saddle you use, check to be sure that each one fits the individual animal's back properly. No part of a saddle should dig into the llama's back or cause rubbing or soreness.

On the Trail

Trail Courtesy

Horses and mules may become nervous or excited at their first sight of a llama piled high with a fully-loaded pack, so special consideration is needed.

Safety dictates that llamas – as the more maneuverable animals – give the right-of-way to riders and their pack stock. To do so, step off the trail several yards downhill, if possible, to allow the horses or mules room to pass easily. When traveling on switchbacks and steep trails with limited visibility, travel slowly and be cautious of approaching riders.



Crossing Streams and Other Obstacles

Standing in water will often cause a llama to relieve itself, so move rapidly through any stream crossing. Wait until you are on the other side to offer your llama a drink of water.

Be careful when crossing fallen logs, especially when leading a string of llamas. Allow them to slowly pick their own way through at their own pace. Take additional care when negotiating boggy areas or any time when the trail surface becomes slippery.

Llamas can generally cross packed snowfields nimbly, but may have difficulty if they sink in over their knees. If in doubt, check out the crossing before taking your llama through.

When negotiating switchbacks, be sure you and your llamas stay on the trail. Cutting across switchbacks causes trail erosion and may lead to injury of your llama pack string.



Poisonous Plants

Some types of plants, such as those in the azalea and delphinium families, are poisonous to llamas and other livestock. Be aware of – and be able to identify – poisonous plants found in the area you visit. For the sake of your llamas, picket them away from these plants, and make sure they don't browse on them during the trip.

Rest Stops

Allow your animals ample stops to rest during your hike to camp. If they relieve themselves along the trail, take a moment to kick the dung off the trail before hiking on.



In Camp

Choosing a Camp

Choose a campsite well off the trail, away from other campers, and at least 200 feet from nearby water sources. Unless you are packing in all your feed, choose a site with good grazing opportunities. Check with the local Ranger District for recommendations.

Select a level area for your tent, and avoid making elaborate "improvements" such as trenches, lean-tos, or rock work that would detract from the natural landscape.

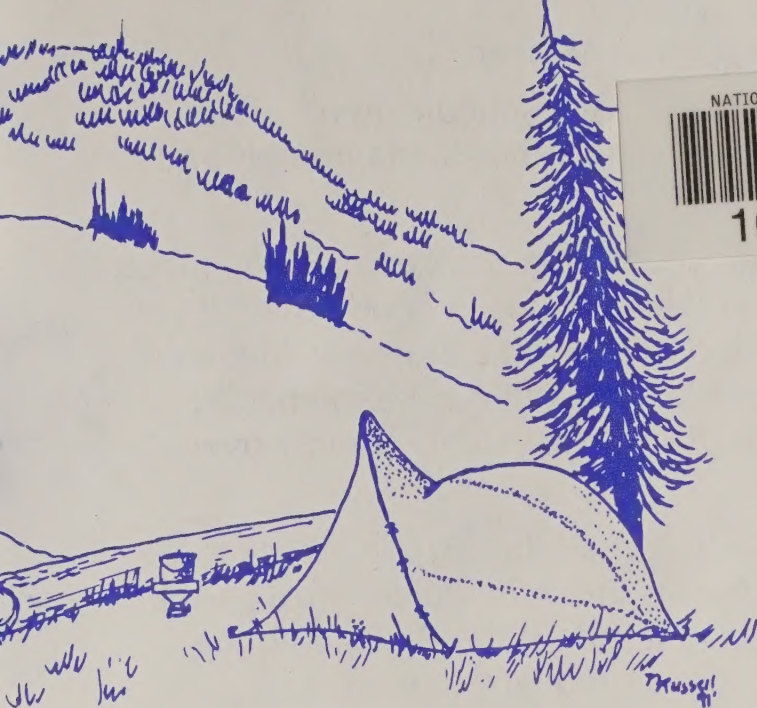
In wilderness areas, no-trace camping techniques include dismantling all fire rings and any other human-made structures prior to breaking camp. Where they are permitted, keep your campfires small. Burn only wood that is dead and down.

Bury human waste about 6-8 inches down in the soil, and well away from water sources. All washing should be done away from the streams and lakes with biodegradable soaps.

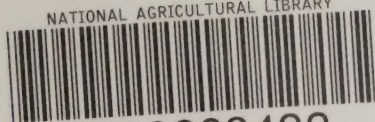
Llama Care

When possible, llamas should be picketed within sight of camp and well off the trail, away from small trees and any potentially poisonous plants. As a safety measure, many packers attach the picket line to stake or "high line" with a piece of rubber or bungee cord. This acts as a shock absorber in case the llama spooks or runs abruptly to the end of its rope.

Because llamas often choose the dampest area in which to make their dung piles, they should not be picketed too close to streams and lakes. On layover days, the picket sites should be moved morning and night to minimize damage. Remember to disperse the dung piles when breaking camp.



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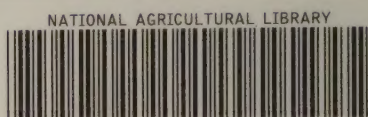


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Check List

- Before you go, check with the local Ranger District about campsites, trail conditions, and pack stock regulations.
- Plan your route with the condition of your party – including your llamas – in mind. Use an up-to-date topographic map.
- Keep your group small. Adhere to any party size limitations that may apply to the area you visit.
- Make sure your llamas are in good physical condition and have well-trimmed toenails.
- Use lightweight gear and limit your pack loads. Keep in mind the condition of your llamas, the rigor of the trail, and the distance you plan to travel. A good guideline for load weights is 25-30 percent of the individual animal's ideal weight.
- Be prepared for all weather conditions and insect pests. Repellent for yourself and your llamas is a must!
- Pack in processed supplemental feed for your llamas: bring about one pound of feed per day for each llama when good grazing opportunities are available; more when grazing is scarce.
- Take along two complete first aid kits: one for yourself, and one equipped to deal with llamas injuries or illnesses.
- Stay alert for parties with horses on the trail, and make every effort to assure a safe and pleasant meeting.
- Locate your campsites 200 feet from lakes and streams, well off the trail and away from fragile areas.
- Picket llamas in sight of camp and well off the trail away from water sources, poisonous plants, small trees, and other fragile vegetation.

- Regularly rotate grazing areas and disperse all dung piles before leaving camp.
- Take along a collapsible bucket for offering water to your llamas. Keep them away from lake shores and streams.
- In camp, hang up your saddles and pack equipment to prevent damage by rodents or other animals.
- When breaking camp, return the area to its natural state as much as possible. Scatter fire ring rocks, log benches, and unused firewood, and dismantle any other human "improvements."
- Keep an extra plastic sack handy to carry out any garbage you may find along the trail or in camp. In general, leave the area in better shape than you found it.



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